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## The arabicized turkish word in the Qur'an: A Study of “Ghassaq”

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### Abstract

Arabicization is one of the linguistic issues that has been handled carefully by the linguists and scholars of Qur'anic studies. This scholarly attention is attributed to a discovery that the Qur'an contains a number of Arabicized words. However, the word *ghassaq* (غَسَّاق) is a Turkish originated word that appears in the Holy Qur'an. This word has been Arabicized by the Arabs before the Qur'an was revealed. In another word, *ghassaq* was used by the Arabs and treated as an Arabic word following the morphological process of the Arabic language. It was also mentioned in one of the Arabic pre-Islam poetry by *Ta'abbata Sharran*:

وله عاري الطنابيب مُمْتَدَّ نَوَاشِرُهُ ... مَدْلَاجَ أَدْهَمَ وَاهِي الْمَاءِ غَسَّاقِ

In Turkish, *ghassaq* refers to cold water or the smelly one. Other usage of this word could be seen in the Turkish lexicons. It has been related to the Turkish language according to Muslim scholars specialized in the terminology of the Qur'an. This paper is a linguistic study which intends to study the word *ghassaq* and to analyze its usage throughout the Qur'an in favor of other similar terms. It will also review the opinion of traditional and contemporary Muslim scholars on the origin of *ghassaq* and its usage in the Qur'an.

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## 1. Introduction

This article discusses a Qur'anic term "*ghassaq*" which repeated twice in the Qur'an, once in chapter 38:57 and once again in chapter 78:25. Both of the uses refer to the pretrial of hellfire on the day of Resurrection. It is known that the Qur'an contains many words from foreign languages like Persian, Roman, Ethiopian, Latin and others. For the word "*ghassaq*", it is assumed that this is a Turkish originated word though it is not confirmed by the Qur'an itself. This paper explores the reality of this assumption and the reason why the Qur'an has chosen this particular word.

Most importantly this paper explores whether this word is really a Turkish word or not. It also scrutinizes the usage and purport of this word in Turkey at the time of Qur'anic revelation. This word, in the books of "foreignness of the Qur'an", is identified by the scholars and exegetes as a non-Arabic foreign word.

Having been mentioned in the books of "foreignness of the Qur'an" the word "*ghassaq*" could be the best evidence for it to be a foreign word in the Qur'an. Many Muslim scholars like Ibn Abbas (687CE), Ibn Qutaybah (889CE), Makki bin Abi Talib (1045CE) and Ibn Hayyan al-Gharnati (1344CE) categorically identified this word as a foreign word.<sup>1</sup>

A cursory look on the years of the abovementioned scholars and their dealings with this word may give an impression that this word is still upholds its foreignness in the Qur'an. This nature is perfectly compatible with the definition of "foreignness of the Qur'an". According to scholars, "foreignness of the Qur'an" refers to certain terms of the Qur'an that remain equivocal to most of the people since the first era of Islam up to the present day.<sup>2</sup> The foreignness of this word is again affirmed by Sahih al-Bukhari which the second most authentic religious book in Islam. In this book, the word "*ghassaq*" is interpreted in the footnote.<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that if the word was not a foreign one a further interpretation of its denotation would have required. Moreover, the interpreters of this book also added to a further elaboration of its meaning.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Disagreements over the Genesis of the Word "*ghassaq*"

There are two different opinions could be traced about this word. One holds that it is Arabic and another argues that it is arabicized. The proponents of being this word Arabic disagree with those who say it is foreign or Turkish origin. Al-Jawaliqi, for example, refers to the root of this word which is "*ghasaa*". According to him, as it has a root in Arabic, it should be logically considered as Arabic word.<sup>5</sup> Al-Khaffazi, al-Alusi and Balashi supported this idea.<sup>6</sup>

However, some traditional Muslim scholars hold that this is an arabicized word and arabicized word refers to the Arab's usage of the foreign words for the meaning which is inconsistent with their original languages.<sup>7</sup> Al-Suyuti says, *al-ghassaq*, in Turkish language, stands for stinking cold. Hamza Fathallah holds a similar view. Unlike, the Father Rafail did not affirm that it is really a Turkish word but he sees a probability of its being Turkish.<sup>8</sup>

Some scholars linked this word to the language "Tokhar"<sup>9</sup> which was a borrowed language and attributed to a central Asian historical region Tokharistan during the period between third and nine century.<sup>10</sup> Al-

<sup>1</sup> . Abdul Aziz Izz al-Din al-Sayyiruan, al-Mujam al-Jami li Gharib Mufradat al-Quran al-Karim: Ibn Abbas, Ibn Qutaybah, Makki bi Abi Talib, Abu Hayyan (Lebanon: Beirut, Dar al-Ilm li al-Malayin, 1986), 301.

<sup>2</sup> . Ibid, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> . Fuad Abd al-Baqi, Mujam Gharib al-Quran (Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1950), p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> . Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar ibn Kathir, 1987), p. 1188.

<sup>5</sup> . Al-Khaffazi, Shifa al-Alil, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> . Al-Alusi, Ruh al-Maani, vol. 17, p. 373.

<sup>7</sup> . Al-Suyuti, al-Muzhar, ed. Muhammad Zad al-Mawla, Dar al-Turath, vol.1, 268.

<sup>8</sup> . Al-Yasui, Gharib al-Lugha al-Arabiyyah, p. 273.

<sup>9</sup> . Ibn al-Athir, al-Lubab fi Tahdhib al-Ansab, p. 173.

<sup>10</sup> . Tokharistan (Tukholo in Chinese sources) - region in the northern flow of Amu-Darya (Oxus) on the territory of modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. <http://www.sogdcoins.narod.ru/english/tokharistan/history.html>

Tabari (d.733), a prominent exegete of the Qur'an, cited Abdullah Ibn Buridah (d.115) who interpreted the word "*ghassaq*" as "stinky" object and it is derived from Tokhar language.<sup>11</sup> However, this narration does not maintain a sound succession to Abdullah and therefore it is categorized by the scholars as weak.<sup>12</sup> Al-Razi traced it as an arabicized Persian word which refers to dirtiness.

However, having reviewed the different opinions, this study finds that the second opinion, which asserts that al-ghassaq is an arabised word, is evidently preferable. Therefore, to establish the logic and evidence of its own standpoint, the study scrutinizes the authenticity of the logics and arguments behind the first opinion. Having held this opinion Balasi made several points as follow:

- Any word derived from the root of the word "al-ghassaq" is not available in the famous Turkish dictionaries.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that Balasi's finding resulted from his search for this word in medieval Turkish lexicons rather than in older ones. The author, in this regard, referred to four lexicons which are mentioned in the footnote of his book "*al-muarrab fi al-Qur'an*".<sup>14</sup> Firstly, Akhtiri Kabir which is second category of Turkish dictionaries that were composed in period between thirteen to eighteen century. The gap between the time and space of this dictionary and the Qur'anic revelation is several centuries as the Qur'an was revealed in seventh century. Secondly, the "*burhan qati*" is another dictionary which is written in Persian language by Muhammad Husain al-Tabrizi in 1062 CE in Hyderabad.<sup>15</sup> It is not clear the implication of this dictionary with this subject. The third is the traditional Turkish dictionary (Turkish to Turkish), S. Sami.<sup>16</sup> The fourth is a pictorial dictionary of Turkish language which is published by the Academy of Turkish Language in Ankara in 1977 CE.<sup>17</sup>

The word *ghassaq* and its root *ghasaq* are mentioned in old Turkish dictionaries such as al-Zamakhshari's (d.1133 CE) *Muqaddimah al-Adab*<sup>18</sup> which was written for non-Arabic speakers in general and for Persians and Turks in special. This dictionary was translated to Turkish language whose dialects consist of *khawarimi*, *qankli* and *qabjaq*.<sup>19</sup> This dictionary is considered as the first category work in Turkish dictionaries and represents a golden age of cultural life in 1100 CE.<sup>20</sup>

- 2. Balasi stated that there is no relation between "*soghok*" and "*gassaq*" as Yau'i assumes, in terms of vocabulary or meaning. He added that, in terms of vocabulary, both do not resemble each other except a slight resemblance of some alphabets in unorganized manner. Moreover, the root of "*soghok*" in Turkish language "*sauk*" exclusively refers to ice and coldness.<sup>21</sup>

It should be mentioned that the Arab has two ways in arabicizing the foreign words. They usually do not use any foreign word without making one of two things. Firstly, they change the accent and its structure which fits the Arabic dialects and structure in a way that makes it distinctive from non-Arab accent. Therefore, they put the word in a morphological scale of Arabic language. Then, they pronounce it as if it is Arabic<sup>22</sup> and its usage continues in their conversation. It, in this way, once happens in their higher poetry. As far as its use in the Qur'an is concerned, its use comes in it after it became Arabic though it is

<sup>11</sup> . Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, vol.21, p. 228.

<sup>12</sup> . Al-Asqalani, *Taqrib al-Tahzib*, vol.1, p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> . Balashi, *al-Muarrab fi al-Quran al-Karim*, p. 265-266.

<sup>14</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> . Ansari, *al-Maajim al-Lughawiyah al-Arabiyyah wa al-Farisiyyah*, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> . Sami, *al-Mujam al-Turkey al-Turathi*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> . Balasi, *al-Muarrab*, p. 266.

<sup>18</sup> . Al-Zamakhshari, *Muqaddimah al-Adab*, p. 9, 15, 16, 21.

<sup>19</sup> . Zamehsheri, *Mukaddimetü'l-Edeb*. Prof. Dr. Nui Yüce tarafından Hvarizm Türkçesi ile.

<sup>20</sup> . Jaqamqiji, *al-Maajim al-Lughawiyah*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> . Balasi, *al-Muarrab*, p. 266.

<sup>22</sup> . Abu Sikkin, *Faqd al-Lughah*, p. 43.

originally arabicized. Secondly, they use the very word without any accentual change or any other amendment in any form. Yet, they name it as an imported or borrowed word and they never compose their poem using this word. The Qur'an never entertains a borrowed word in its text.

However, "ghassaq" is an arabicized word derived from Turkish origin and it is not a borrowed one. It has been undergone some particular linguistic processes before it became arabicized which is caught by Balasi's observation as he traced an interchangeable use of some of the alphabets of this word in both languages. Yet, the order in this interchange of the alphabets, in Balasi's understanding, remains vague. It should be noted that this word became arabicized after it has undergone a fundamental accentual change and an alteration in its morphological scale.<sup>23</sup>

The root of the word, before it was arabicized, could be traced in old Turkish dictionaries. Al-Kashghari (d.1090 CE) presents some evidences which give an impression that, in the pristine use of this word in Turkish language, "ghassaq" is derived from "sugh" (سُوف) which means water and coldness is translated in Turkish as soğuk. Some researchers argue that 'ğ' is borrowed from other languages as it happened in some other cases as follow: bağır- 'shout', eğik 'bent', dağ 'mountain', gittiğim.<sup>24</sup> The similar instances could be found in modern Turkish languages too.

English	Arabic	Turkish	No
	بَارِدٌ	soğuk	1
cold	بَرْدٌ	soğuk algınlığı	2
i got cold	أَصِيبَ بِالْبَرْدِ	soğuk almak	3
extreme cold	اطلاق بَارِدٌ	soğuk atış	4
dry stamp	الطَّايِبُ الْجَافُ	soğuk damga	5
Conduct with coolness	سَلَكَ بِبُرْدَةٍ ، إِظْهَرَ بِبُرْدَةٍ	soğuk davranmak	6
cold point	نُكْطَةُ بَارِدَةٍ	soğuk espri	7
cold war	حَرْبٌ بَارِدَةٌ	soğuk savaş	8
The Cold War	الْحَرْبُ الْبَارِدَةُ	soğuk savaş	9
cold blooded	بَارِدُ الدَّمِ ، رَابِطُ الْجَاشِ	soğukkanlı	10
coldness	الْبُرْدَةُ	soğukluk	11
to become frozen	تَجَمَّدَ مِنَ الْبَرْدِ	soğuktan donmak	12
to become cold	بَرَدَ - بَرَدًا ، بُرِدَا	soğumak	13
to make cold	أَبْرَدَ	soğutmak	14
refregarator	بِرَادَةٌ ج. بَرَادَات	soğutucu	15

- 3. Balasi argued that there was no relation between Arabic and Turkish language during and before Qur'anic revelation. So, how can these two languages came to contract?<sup>25</sup>

It cannot be surely denied that there was an interaction between Arab and Turks before emergence of Islam. If such is the fact, there is a possibility of linguistic interaction too. In fact, having been inhabited in the deep into desert, Arab, before Islam, were not isolated from others regions of the world. The evidence of Arab's awareness of Turkey could be known from a verse of a poem composed by a poet namely al-Maimun bin Qays (d.629CE).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> . al-Qashghari, Diwan Luhgah al-Turk, vol.3, p. 55.

(24) Aşlı Göksel & Celia Kerslake, Turkish: A Comprehensive Grammar, Phonological units 7, P: 32.

<sup>25</sup> . al-Masri, Tarikh Adab al-Turki, p. 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> . Al-Ashi, al-Diwan, p.5.

وَلَقَدْ شَرِبْتُ الْخَمْرَ تَرَّ      كُضُّ حَوْلَنَا تَرْكُ وَكَابُلُ

I have abused drug.....Kabul and Turk are dancing around us.

Balasi has explicitly mentioned in his book the interaction between Arabic and European languages. According to him, European languages borrowed hundred of Arabic words. So as a result of this interaction there is a possibility of happening of the word ghasaq in Arabic. Muhammad Rawwas asserted of its being a Turkish word in his book *al-Alafaz al-Qur'aniyyah*.

- Balasi claims that ghasaq, with its all morphological forms, implies that it is an Arabic word.<sup>27</sup> It is definite that Arab chose a perfect morphological scale “faal” for this word when they arabicized it. Thus, its structure has been changed and it became like Arabic word. Al-Tabari mentions that the Arab made it an attributive case which is derived from ghasaq.<sup>28</sup> It is worthy to mention that one of the principles of Turkish language is to add to the verbs, nouns and attributives addendums in order to indicate to the time of verb. For example if one wants to say “he will not come” in Turkish language it equals *gelmiyecek* (ecek+y+me+ğel). Similarly, the Turkish equivalent for the phrase “he will not take” is *almıyacak* (acak+y+ma+al).<sup>29</sup> There is an accentual similarity of the acak and ecek in the above mentioned phrases with ghas-saq. This similarity may imply to a morphological derivation in its original language.

The disagreements of linguists, exegetes and scholars over the meaning of this word could be a good proof for this word to be a non-arabic arabicized word. Ibn Ashur, in this connection, says that this word with this shape and root was not familiar to Arab and this is the reason behind exegetes’ disagreement over its meaning<sup>30</sup> and some seemed not knowledgeable of this word.<sup>31</sup>

However, some prominent scholars’ views on the meaning of ghasaq are presented hereinafter.

1. Ibn Abbas (d.687) says: chilling cold which could be scaring.<sup>32</sup>
2. Dahhaq (d.719) says: extreme cold.<sup>33</sup>
3. Mujahid (d.722) says: unbearable cold.<sup>34</sup>
4. Zaid bin Ali (d.740) says: what drains from pus and becomes separated from skin.<sup>35</sup>
5. Al-Suddi al-Kabir (d.744) says: tears which drain from eyes.<sup>36</sup>
6. Ibn Qutaybah (d.889) says: pus that will be drained from skin of residents of hellfire.<sup>37</sup>
7. Abu Bakr al-Sajastani (d.941) says: coldness that burns as fire burns.<sup>38</sup>
8. Al-Asfahani (d.1054) says: extreme coldness which has a burning effect.<sup>39</sup>
9. Al-Zamakhshari (d.1143) says: what drains from black skins.<sup>40</sup>
10. Al-Jawaliqi (d.1144) says: a severe cold which carrying burning effect.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>27</sup> . Balasi, p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> . Al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Tabari, vol. 21, p. 226.

<sup>29</sup> . G.L.LEWIS, TURKISH GRAMMAR, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> . Ibn Ashur, al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, vol.24, p. 286.

<sup>31</sup> . al-Dimyati, Ithaf Fudhala al-Bahsar fi al-Qiraat al-Arbaa Ashar, p. 666.

<sup>32</sup> . Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jami li Ahkam al-Quran, vol. 15, p. 198.

<sup>33</sup> . al-Tabari, vol. 21, p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> . Taqi Said, Dhahirah al-Taarib fi al-Lugha al-Arabiyyah, vol. 2, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> . al-Qurtubi, vol. 15. P. 198.

<sup>37</sup> . Ibn Qutaibah, Tafsir Gharib al-Quran, p. 51, 381.

<sup>38</sup> . al-Sajistani, Gharib al-Quran, p. 353.

<sup>39</sup> . al-Asfahani, Gharib al-Quran, p. 360.

<sup>40</sup> . Al-Zamakhshari, Asas al-Balaghah, ed. Abd al-Rahim Mahmud, p. 324.

<sup>41</sup> . al-Jawaliqi, al-Muaarrab, p. 283.

11. Al-Razi (d.1210) says: a hateful black drink of which one becomes alienated.<sup>42</sup>
12. Ibn Manzur (d.1311) says: what comes out from the skins of the residents of hellfire and their pus.<sup>43</sup>
13. Al-Khaffazi (d.1659) says: a bad smelly cold.<sup>44</sup>

However, the preferable opinion to researchers of this study is the one which refers to the meaning of coldness and its attributes. The reason behind Qur'anic choice of this word may be attributed to a relative closeness of Turkey to Arab in terms of characteristic and of Arab weather which reach to the degree of chilliness. The Qur'an did not say cold drink. Instead, it says ghassaq and Arab were aware of its meaning as the Turks mean. They surely heard of it through news, stories and narrations or their yearly tour to the Sham region.

If we look back to thousand years we may understand why the Qur'an chose this word from Turkish language. Al-Kashghari described the cold weather of Turkey with very extreme characters in his book *Diwan Lughat al-Turk*. He might be experienced a snowing weather that killed animals, burnt fruits or chilling human nerves.<sup>45</sup>

The Arab has never experienced a cold weather of such characteristics. Therefore, to portray the situation of extreme coldness in Hereafter the Qur'an chose this Turkish word.<sup>46</sup> Imam Tabari mentioned all these abovementioned opinions and did not neglect any.<sup>47</sup> To him, what drains from the skins of inhabitants of Hell or their bodies, their tears and pus of black color or as such other abominable objects will gather in a drain in Hell. Residents of Hell then will try to drink it. In fact, this drink will be rot and cold in character. Therefore, they will not be able to drink it because of its horrible smell and chilliness. He added that ghassaq refers to a bitter cold.

Having reviewed the cited sources, it could be said that ghassaq is a Turkish originated word which was borrowed in Arabic and became arabicized through a systematic process.

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<sup>42</sup> . al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, vol. 30, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> . Ibn Mandhur, *Lisan al-Arab*, p. 3255-3256.

<sup>44</sup> . al-Khaffazi, *Shifa al-Alil*, p. 191.

<sup>45</sup> . al-Kashghari, vol. 2, p. 282.

<sup>46</sup> . Ibn Rajab, *al-Tkhwif min al-Nar*, p. 151.

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